PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Student Activism in 1960s America

Stories from Queens College

Magnus O. Bassey

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Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements

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Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested, actors in local, national and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually-informed studies that analyse labour movements, new social movements and other forms of protest from early modernity to the present. We conceive of 'social movements' in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organisations and mere protest events. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. This new series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicise the concept of 'social movement'. It hopes to revitalise the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analysing what Charles Tilly has called the 'dynamics of contention'.

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Magnus O. Bassey

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INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALE BEWEGUNGEN

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Series Editors' Foreword

Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested, actors in local, national, and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. Our series reacts to what can be described as a recent boom in the history of social movements. We can observe a development from the crisis of labor history in the 1980s to the boom in research on social movements in the 2000s. The rise of historical interests in the development of civil society and the role of strong civil societies as well as non-governmental organizations in stabilizing democratically constituted polities has strengthened the interest in social movements as a constituent element of civil societies.

In different parts of the world, social movements continue to have a strong influence on contemporary politics. In Latin America, trade unions, labor parties, and various left-of-center civil society organizations have succeeded in supporting left-of-center governments. In Europe, peace movements, ecological movements, and alliances intent on campaigning against poverty and racial discrimination and discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation have been able to set important political agendas for decades. In other parts of the world, including Africa, India, and South East Asia, social movements have played a significant role in various forms of community building and

community politics. The contemporary political relevance of social movements has undoubtedly contributed to a growing historical interest in the topic.

Contemporary historians are not only beginning to historicize these relatively recent political developments; they are also trying to relate them to a longer history of social movements, including traditional labor organizations, such as working-class parties and trade unions. In the longue durée, we recognize that social movements are by no means a recent phenomenon and are not even an exclusively modern phenomenon, although we realize that the onset of modernity emanating from Europe and North America across the wider world from the eighteenth century onwards marks an important departure point for the development of civil societies and social movements.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominance of national history over all other forms of history writing led to a thorough nationalization of the historical sciences. Hence social movements have been examined traditionally within the framework of the nation state. Only during the last two decades have historians begun to question the validity of such methodological nationalism and to explore the development of social movements in comparative, connective, and transnational perspectives taking into account processes of transfer, reception, and adaptation. While our book series does not preclude work that is still being carried out within national frameworks (for, clearly, there is a place for such studies, given the historical importance of the nation state in history), it hopes to encourage comparative and transnational histories on social movements.

At the same time, as historians have begun to research the history of those movements, a range of social theorists, from Jürgen Habermas to Pierre Bourdieu and from Slavoj Žižek to Alain Badiou as well as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to Miguel Abensour, to name but a few, have attempted to provide philosophical-cum-theoretical frameworks in which to place and contextualize the development of social movements. History has arguably been the most empirical of all the social and human sciences, but it will be necessary for historians to explore further to what extent these social theories can be helpful in guiding and framing the empirical work of the historian in making sense of the historical development of social movements. Hence the current series is also hoping to make a contribution to the ongoing dialogue between social theory and the history of social movements.

This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually informed studies that analyze labor movements, new social movements, and other forms of protest from early modernity to the present. With this series, we seek to revive, within the context of historiographical developments since the 1970s, a conversation between historians on the one hand and sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists on the other.

Unlike most of the concepts and theories developed by social scientists, we do not see social movements as directly linked, a priori, to processes of social and cultural change and therefore do not adhere to a view that distinguishes between old (labor) and new (middle-class) social movements. Instead, we want to establish the concept "social movement" as a heuristic device that allows historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to investigate social and political protests in novel settings. Our aim is to historicize notions of social and political activism in order to highlight different notions of political and social protest on both left and right.

Hence, we conceive of "social movements" in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organizations and mere protest events. But we also include processes of social and cultural change more generally in our understanding of social movements: this goes back to nineteenth-century understandings of "social movement" as processes of social and cultural change more generally. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social, and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. In short, this series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicize the concept of "social movement." It also hopes to revitalize the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analyzing what Charles Tilly has called the "dynamics of contention."

In his *Student Activism in 1960s America: Stories from Queens College*, Magnus Bassey traces the reasons why students became involved in social justice and antiwar campaigns over the course of the 1960s. Bassey's study "identifies the QC student activists of the 1960s; how and why they became activists, their activities, their achievement as activists, and

what motivated them to think that they could make history themselves by confronting racism."

He thus unpacks grand social theories about social movement mobilization and, in particular, theories that highlight ideology as a key motivational factor, instead, he asks how these grand theories worked in practice and how ideology was put to work and created meaning among the activists. Instead of applying social movement theories, Bassey has unearthed activists' memories and tells their stories to explain why they decided to protest and what the protests meant to them.

Queens College is a good case study for such an endeavor. It was the only one of the City University of New York (CUNY) colleges that saw significant student activism. Queens College also saw campaigns for social justice that can be seen as pioneering in the context of other campaigns. The student strike at Queens College in November 1961 provided the foundational moment for later protests: the strike happened in protests against ban on speakers on campus that were deemed controversial and it was a way for the student activists "to fight power on campus, to fight racism and discrimination, and above all, to fight for students' rights which had been stifled by the propagation of *in loco parentis* by the QC administration." Queens College students also participated "in an ongoing fight to keep CUNY totally tuition-free." Such protests were also pioneers in the context of US student activism more generally: they happened before the mobilizations of the Free Speech Movement (FSM) that started at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as the large mobilizations at Columbia University around 1968: Mario Savio, a key FSM activist "worked as a picket captain during the student strike at QC in 1961."

A key theme in Bassey's richly documented work is connections between activists in the United States and beyond. For example, in 1963, the QC Student Help Project went to the southern United States and observed some of the civil rights organizing by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) first hand. Also in 1963, Queens College students traveled to Mexico, specifically "to assist impoverished Mexicans to build a laundry facility in the town of Taxco."

As we witness debates about the freedom of speech, the relationship between research and activism, and student mobilizations in our own world as this book goes to press, this book might encourage us to reflect

on the motivations of student activism that defy straightforward categorization. It also alerts us to the importance of personal, inter-generational, and collective memories in student mobilizations.

Bochum, Germany Stefan Berger
Stirling, UK Holger Nehring

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mentioning that Mark was the initiator/founder and the first contributor to the Queens College library's CRM Archive. A few words cannot begin to acknowledge my indebtedness to him. Mark was very generous with his assistance and magnanimous with his time. He was wonderfully supportive and encouraging in this effort.

I must also express my profound gratitude to Dr. Sidney B. Simon (now deceased), Rabbi Moshe Mitchell Shur, Joseph Liesner, Elliot Linzer, Joan Nestle, Michael R. Wenger, Stan F. Shaw, Dorothy M. Zellner, Arthur Gatti, Lucy Komisar, and Andrew Berman who either gracefully granted me interviews or responded to one or the other of my many questions and requests. I must also thank Eleanor Armour-Thomas, the former head of our department, for her incredible support through the years. My sincere thanks to Georgine Ingber, Andy Poon, and Ayesha Ali of Creative Services for their help with the cover photograph. I want to thank the blind reviewer whose comments and suggestions have made this a better book than I ever set out to write. To others, I thank them all. However, I assume full responsibility for the views expressed, and none of the above are responsible for any errors or misstatements in this book.

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Dr. Magnus O. Bassey is a Professor in the Department of Secondary Education and Youth Services at Queens College, The City University of New York. He is the author of *Western Education and Political Domination in Africa: A Study in Critical and Dialogical Pedagogy; Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Nigeria, 1885-1945; Malcolm X and African American Self-Consciousness*. Dr. Bassey has also authored numerous academic articles. His articles have appeared in rigorously peer reviewed journals.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> *I was motivated by Queens College and its more than eight decades of alumni, and I wanted to become part of its story. The school boasts an inspiring legacy: generations of people embodying the motto, "Discimus ut Serviamus".* ("We learn so that we may serve")
>
> —Dr. Frank H. Wu, President, Queens College, 2020

David Farber described the 1960s as the age of great dreams and the era of revolt, rupture, and contradictions in America.[1] It was a decade of possibilities, grandeur, and tragedy. This period saw America's efforts to send astronauts into space, the establishment of the Peace Corps during the Administration of President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous and prophetic, "I Have a Dream" speech, and Lyndon B. Johnson's commitment to the "Great Society."[2] However, as Richard Braungart and Margaret Braungart, have noted, "In the mid-1960s, the tide of hope and optimism began to give way to frustration and ugliness."[3] Frustration and ugliness in America in the mid-1960s emanated from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and others,[4] the Vietnam War quagmire, the draft, and the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Consequently, some Americans began to question their political leaders who had told them, for instance, that the Vietnam War would be over in

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a very short time. As a result, many began to lose faith in the efficacy of their government.

Based on injustices, hypocrisy, and ugliness that some students saw in their college campuses, in the country, and in the world at large, they began to question their political leaders. Students organized their discontents over three major issues namely, civil rights, free speech, and antiwar concerns. Their protests involved direct actions such as sit-ins, marches, picketing, and boycotts. They protested segregation and systemic racism. They pushed for an increase in college and university diversity, civil rights, voting rights, antidiscrimination laws, an inclusive environment for students of color, changes in college discriminatory policies, and a voice in administrative decision-making. They also protested racial and gender inequalities and against the Vietnam War. During the 1960s, student activists in American campuses could be heard chanting, "Peace in Vietnam Now!" "Power to the People." "Black Power." "Up Against the Wall." "Do not fold, spindle, or mutilate."[5] The first major revolt by college students against a school administration in the United States in the 1960s was the Free Speech Movement (FSM) led by Mario Savio[6] at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964. The Berkeley demonstrations set the tone for other student demonstrations in the United States during this period.

The increasing US involvement in the Vietnam War brought the next phase of student protests that focused on the institutions that supported the Vietnam War efforts. Students and some faculty were incensed by the contributions their universities and colleges were making toward military research, the Vietnam War, and the military-industrial complex. In 1966 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) sneered at Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, and prevented his car from leaving Harvard campus. Campus unrests included protests and boycotts of Dow Chemical Company (the manufacturers of napalm and a major defense contractor), burning of draft cards, the closing of military draft induction centers, sit-ins, rallies, marches, and even a March on the Pentagon in 1967.[7] In the same year, 1967, students from the University of Wisconsin protested recruitment on their campus by Dow Chemical because it was a major defense contractor.[8] In April 1968, several hundred students led by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), protested Columbia University's affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) and Columbia's proposal to build a ten-story gymnasium in the recreational space of Morningside Park. Students at the University of Chicago

organized a sit-in to protest Selective Service examinations being held on their campus. As if these were not enough, on August 28, 1968, antiwar protesters disrupted the Democratic Party National Convention in Chicago. Indeed, antiwar protests also took place at San Francisco State College and at the University of Wisconsin. There were student protests at Cornell University and at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1969. In the 1970s, student protests were reported at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and at Kent State University in Ohio. During the Kent State demonstrations, the National Guard fired into the crowd, killing four students, and wounding nine.[9] At Jackson State College in Mississippi, the state police fired at a dorm killing two students and wounding twelve. Students all over the United States mobilized for political reforms, and in all, there were protests in more than 700 college and university campuses nationwide.[10] As Alexander Cruden has stated, "Students on the front lines of the struggle…risked their scholarships, degrees, careers, and even their lives, yet generally kept their cool and made their case with thoughtful logic and nonviolent bravery."[11]

Student protests at Queens College (QC) predated the Free Speech Movement (FSM) of 1964.[12] As QC students moved away from the repressive McCarthy era of the 1950s, they began to confront and challenge those in power at the college. The defining characteristic of this break from the past was a student strike on November 16, 1961, in objection to the ban of controversial speakers who had been invited to campus by student clubs. This strike happened before the Free Speech Movement protest at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1964, and before the more famous student protest at Columbia University in 1968. The student strike at QC in 1961 gave the activists among them a direct and immediate way to fight power on campus, to fight racism and discrimination, and above all, to fight for students' rights which had been stifled by the propagation of *in loco parentis* by the QC administration. As one commentator noted, during the 1960s, QC "campus was vibrant with activism, which included organizing folk music festivals and antinuclear weapon rallies, fighting speaker ban laws, and supporting school programs in Prince Edward County, among other demonstrations and protests."[13]

Although studies on social movements and activism have been carried out by scholars from about the mid-1800s, in most of these studies, the processes of collective action are often lost in broad sweeping theories of social change.[14] Similarly, Richard G. Braungart and Margaret M. Braungart have argued that most of the studies on student movements are

discipline-based and are often somewhat narrow in focus.[15] Since student movements of the 1960s cannot be attributed to a single explanation, it is therefore my position that to understand student movements of the 1960s, one must focus on individual historical contexts because in the critical study of social movements, motives cover a wide array of theoretical positions. The material in this study contributes to new research on student activism by shedding new light on the untold stories of individual QC student activists. The study presents first-person narratives from the actual participants, and tells their stories in their own voices, from their own records, and from the documents they left behind. It identifies the QC student activists of the 1960s; how and why they became activists, their activities, their achievement as activists, and what motivated them to think that they could make history themselves by confronting racism. It provides an intimate look at the students' lives and their social justice journey, beginning at Queens College and as they moved into their careers. The study also examines the organizing models of the student activists at QC in the 1960s.

* * *

It has been documented that participation in activism is often a product of ideological identification with the values of the movement together with a history of previous activism.[16] In this context, even before the 1964 activism heated up on campus, QC students were already at the forefront of social justice work. For instance, during the summer of 1963, about forty students from QC traveled to Mexico as part of the Queens College Mexico Volunteers, sponsored by the college's Newman House to assist impoverished Mexicans to build a laundry facility in the town of Taxco. On their second trip, the volunteers built a school that is still thriving in Mexico today.[17] Political consciousness of students on campus was further stirred up when the Student Association hired buses for a large delegation of QC students to attend the March on Washington, D.C., where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in August 1963. These students came back to campus having taken Dr. King's message to heart and were fired up. In addition, QC students were also involved in numerous protests in New York City during the early 1960s.

According to Michael J. Sandel, "Times of trouble prompt us to recall the ideals by which we live."[18] At QC, social justice became the students'

guiding principle for activism and remains to this day the abiding counsel for moral and civic community work. For example, more than a matter of public debate or moral suasion, Lucy Komisar left QC between 1962 and 1963 to edit the *Mississippi Free Press* in Jackson, Mississippi despite the high levels of brutality meted out to civil rights workers in Mississippi. Lucy's example must have been instructive in the recruitment of QC volunteers for Prince Edward County during the summer of 1963 and for Freedom Summer in 1964. At about the same time, a former QC student, Dorothy M. Zellner was a full-time SNCC staff working in the South. As a student at QC, Dorothy was a writer and editor for a major student newspaper, *Crown,* influencing students on major social issues in her work against racism and discrimination. Under a different circumstance but related to activism, sixteen students from QC and one of their professors, Dr. Rachel Weddington, went to Farmville, Virginia, in the summer of 1963 to prepare Black students for classes for "free schools" that would be open to all students in the fall of 1963 because schools had been closed in Prince Edward County, Virginia, for four years by the state due to Virginia's "Massive Resistance" to integration.[19]

We see another example of QC activism after three civil rights workers were declared missing in Mississippi, the efforts by the leadership of the Student Help Project in highlighting and emphasizing profound shortcomings in Virginia and Mississippi generated intense catalytic resonance on campus.[20] This led to the establishment of "fast for freedom," during which seven QC students went on a five-day hunger strike to draw the attention of the press, television networks, and the public to what was happening in Mississippi. Another goal of the fast was to protest segregation and to put pressure on the federal government to protect civil rights workers. Some of the students involved in the fast included Gary Ackerman, a student newspaper editor (and, later, a member of the New York Senate from 1979 to 1983 and a member of the US House of Representatives from 1983 to 2013); Michael R. Wenger, chairman of the Student Help Project at QC 1964–1965 (who later served as the Deputy Director for Outreach and Program Development for President Clinton's Initiative on Race); and Ronald (Ron) F. Pollack, the Student Association President (who later was the Founding Executive Director of Families USA and the Founding Executive Director of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). Many of the QC student activists from the 1960s have brought their social values and political commitments into successful and meaningful careers in public service, activism, and social

justice causes. Some of the QC activists have provided national leadership on antipoverty programs, parenting, school–family relationships, and helped in writing special education laws for other countries. Indeed, many of them have been teachers, lawyers, librarians, community organizers, union leaders, professors, writers, advocates, and the list goes on.[21]

The game-changers. Lucy Komisar, one of the 1960s QC activists noted in a 2009 lecture that her education at QC was a political and moral one, but these were not in the Queens College course catalog. From the interviews I have conducted with some of the QC activists of the 1960s, and the archival records I have reviewed, activism or social movement were not part of the Queens College curriculum or even listed in the catalog. However, many of the student activists told me and I have on record that Ms. Helen Hendricks, an African American College Office Assistant in the office of Student Activities at QC, was one of the driving forces in social justice activism at QC. Ms. Hendricks rose to the rank of Administrative Assistant in the Office of Student Activities, and in that capacity, she was able to support various student projects. She was closely connected to many students and was a driving force behind many student projects and activities on campus.[22] Mark levy, one of the Freedom Summer volunteers told me that Ms. Hendricks, in her quiet and effective ways, was particularly supportive of their activist endeavors at QC. Indeed, Mark stated that along with "Prof. Waddington, Ms. Hendricks was a key campus voice giving us kids the encouragement to invest time and take risks in doing the 'right' and 'just' things."[23] Michael Wenger, a QC student activist of the 1960s, affirmed that Ms. Hendricks was a driving force in most of their activist endeavors on campus. This view was reinforced in a written memo to me by Stan Shaw, one of the leaders and the chair of the Student Help Project (1963–1964) that Ms. Hendricks was aptly the mentor they needed and had at QC. This perception of Ms. Hendricks is widespread and entrenched among QC activists of the 1960s. Ms. Hendricks later became Assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs charged with the responsibility of supporting minority students interested in pursuing graduate programs. Through her efforts, there was a major increase in the admission and graduation rates of minority students in law and medical schools. She was promoted to Higher Education officer in 1986 before she retired in 1992. In a recent interview with Michael Wenger and Stan Shaw, two leaders of the Student Help Project at QC, Ms. Hendricks discussed her role in advising and mentoring students of different backgrounds while

she was employed in the Office of Student Activities. She also talked about her experiences as one of the few African American female staff members on campus during the era of the social justice movements of the 1960s. In that interview, Stan Shaw, a Student Help Program leader in the 1960s, asked Ms. Hendricks about the tension that existed in her office between the college authorities who did not accept many of the things the student activists were doing on campus even though Ms. Hendricks was in support of most of them. She responded that in such instances she simply acted as a go-between to soften the blows from both sides. Another personality who provided critical support for student activism on QC campus in the 1960s was a well-respected African American professor, Dr. Rachel Weddington (deceased). As one student activist, Stan Shaw said, "As young leaders, we had the vision and energy to change the world but not the wisdom and maturity to make things happen. Dr. Weddington had an abundance of those latter traits."[24] Dr. Weddington was a mentor to most of the Civil Rights groups at QC. She even traveled with QC students to Prince Edward County, Virginia. It is noted that her calming presence and relationship with the Black community were keys to the effectiveness of the Prince Edward County project. It is no wonder that Dr. Weddington was a member of the committee that designed the Freedom School curriculum which was devised to improve African American educational needs in Mississippi. In a recent interview, Ms. Hendricks expressed the view that some of the Civil Rights activities on campus went smoothly because the Dean of Students and members of the Academic Senate respected the views of Dr. Weddington who was the faculty advisor to many of the civil rights student groups.[25] Another important influence on student activism at QC in the 1960s was Dr. Sidney Simon (deceased). Like Rachel Weddington, Dr. Simon was the faculty advisor for some of the civil rights groups at QC. He mentored and trained students who were preparing to tutor students in Prince Edward County, Virginia in the summer of 1963. He led several training sessions for the students out of his house in Long Beach, Long Island, New York. His well-known motto was, "deed should always match creeds."[26] Michael Wenger, one of the leaders of the Student Help Project recollected the important part Dr. Simon played in encouraging them to do more for social justice. He said, "Sid was telling us that [the Student Help Project in South Jamaica and Prince Edward County] weren't enough. If our commitment to freedom and justice was truly a deeply held value, we had to act repeatedly over time, incorporating our commitment into our

everyday activities."[27] In short, Dr. Simon was telling these students that it was not enough for them to shout their beliefs from the rooftops or to act on their beliefs whimsically but to get out of their comfort zones regularly to back up their words with action.[28] Stan Shaw and Michael Wenger maintained in a book chapter that the CORE faculty advisers, three members of the education department accelerated their understanding that social justice was part of a healthy society and instigated the activist process by challenging them to do more than just protest.[29] Michael Wenger credits Helen Hendricks, Sidney (Sid) Simon, and Rachel Weddington with turning them from young impetuous, immature, and somewhat disrespectful young people into more mature, more respectful, more responsible, and thoughtful adults.[30] Lucy Komisar in her personal narrative in 2009 told her audience at QC how Michael Harrington held weekly public meetings with them at Deb's Hall during which time they debated and shared their concerns about ideology, social movements, social justice issues, and inequality in American society.[31]

A reviewer had asked, just as many others have asked me, what made QC such a rich site for student activism in the 1960s although other CUNY college campuses had influential student programs like the Student Help Project, CORE, student newspapers, and others, but activism was not as intense as in QC? My answer is that unlike other CUNY campuses, members of the QC Student Help Project went to the South in 1963 as a group and saw the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) officials organize protests, boycotts, pickets, sit-ins, and resistance in Prince Edward County. As we will see elsewhere in this book, while in Virginia, members of the QC Student Help Project were equipped with the courage, information, and organizational tools to confront power, and they shared these skills with others when they returned to campus in 1963. They showed their colleagues at QC how they could confront systemic racism and become agents of change. These volunteers were able to connect protests to QC students' profound thoughts of activism as democratic action on campus. The students who went South realized that they could channel their energies and power to bring about change. This is how Michael R. Wenger and Stan F. Shaw, two leaders of the Student Help Project who went to Prince Edward County, Virginia in 1963 made this point:

> Through our Prince Edward County experience, we not only learned that we could be change agents, but we learned how to be change agents. We developed skills in communication, goal setting, team building, planning, fund-raising, political organization, community organization, teaching, and advocacy.[32]

Back on campus after the Virginia project, Wenger states, "We intensified our activities as we sought to generate wider and stronger support for the civil rights movement among students, and to raise their awareness of the persistent double standard with which our society viewed the value of a human life."[33] Stefan M. Bradley in his book, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* documented similar findings at Columbia University some years later in 1968. This is what he said:

> Many of these young people had been exposed to the Civil Rights movement in the South. Students, white and black, had traveled throughout the South, participating in freedom rides, registering voters, and even teaching in inadequate schools. After witnessing firsthand, the ugliness of racial discrimination and oppression, many of the student protesters believed that it was their obligation to change society…These black and white students, taking their cue from the Civil Rights movement, formed coalitions to fight racism in the early 1960s.[34]

It is important to point out here that the student activists at QC in the 1960s were by no means representatives of the campus community or even somewhere in-between, rather they were outliers who were often labeled "troublemakers"[35] by the college administration and many of the other students on campus because QC campus in the 1960s was conservative to the core.[36] Despite overwhelming odds, these activists did not succumb to the machination of their adversaries. Joan Nestle, one of the student activists at QC in the 1960s confirmed in a correspondence with me that they were called the scum of the earth at QC, but even then, they kept on going.[37] A lot of the students at QC at this time cared very little or not at all about social justice issues because they were inherently conservative. They were more preoccupied with their schoolwork and a few extracurricular activities. However, as Mark Levy recollected, it was only a very small group of artsy, poetry-reading, guitar-playing bohemians and beatniks that brought activism and activist backgrounds with them to

QC as "red-diaper babies."[38] Joan Nestle, one of the QC activists of the 1960s told me,

> We stand in the embers of near history—the McCarthy 50s with its hate mongering, its fear of complicated thought, its believe that difference was treason, was my grounding for seeking out others who wanted to see a different America. It was at Queens College that I met my first community of activists, those who were called red diaper babies –-because their parents had been involved in the labor struggles of the 1930s and 40s. They had experience in organizing protests, they taught me that our struggles had a history, had its poets like Brecht, its singers like Odetta, that there was a culture of resistance.[39]

In my research and findings, many of the student activists at QC in the 1960s had parents who were civil rights activists themselves or had parents who were supportive of civil rights causes.[40] Indeed, from available archival records and the oral interviews conducted, I found out, just as Doug McAdam and Jon N. Hale uncovered in their own studies, that the values of the student activists at QC were consistent with the core values that the volunteers learned at home.[41] As Michael Wenger (a student activist himself) remembered, QC in his day had a predominantly White student body, some of whose parents were Jewish immigrants and working-class families. Some of these parents were Holocaust survivors who felt a deep commitment to social justice which they passed on to their children. Additionally, for some of the parents, bigotry in the South was a clear reminder of the persecution that they had fled from Europe and other parts of the world. And as they saw it, if what was happening to Blacks in the South was allowed to continue, then the same could happen to Jews who were out of line. On the other hand, some people were just perplexed by the sheer brutality in the South. This group which included Michael Wenger himself, "simply could not understand how a desire for basic human rights could generate such brutality. How could other human beings use police dogs, billy clubs, fire hoses, and cattle prods against peacefully protesting human beings who were practicing nonviolence?"[42] they wondered. Wenger believes that these are some of the explanations, among many, why:

> On a small tree-lined campus in the heart of a bustling, growing, residential part of New York City, the children of these immigrants marched to protest the brutality in the South, conducted fund-raising drives to support the

> freedom riders and the lunch-counter protestors, and arranged lectures and 'teach-in' activities on campus to raise student awareness and implore the federal government to do more to support racial justice.[43]

Let me at this juncture briefly comment on my research data and methodology. This research is based on primary sources derived essentially from archival materials collected at QC Rosenthal Library. To begin my research, I visited the QC Civil Rights and activist archives at Rosenthal Library and consulted the QC Roll Call of Queens College Students and Faculty who participated in the southern Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s created by Mark Levy for the QC Library Archives.[44] Next, I reviewed a comprehensive list of QC activists of the 1960s in *Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement* also created by Mark Levy. Finally, I reviewed Queens College CORE newsletter parts 1 and 2.[45] From the collated list, I was able to identify 45 subjects including four professors who served as mentors to the various student groups. After an extensive and a thorough review of archival records, I earmarked 31 activists for this study based on available archival materials and records of their activism. Of this number, three of the student activists on my list and one professor had died, but there were sufficient archival materials about their activism in the library to warrant their inclusion in the study. With the help of Mark Levy and other available resources, I was able to get the e-mail addresses of 26 QC student activists and one professor (totaling 27) and sent them e-mails. In the e-mail, I explained my mission as a researcher interested in studying student activism at QC in the 1960s. Each e-mail was accompanied by a set of questionnaires consisting of eighteen questions that asked the volunteers about their experiences at QC as activists. I wanted to know the number of years each volunteer spent at QC. I also wanted to know why they became activists, what or who influenced them, their major in college, where they served, information explaining their duties and assignments, their areas of deployment, their service experiences, information about the nature of the students they taught (for those who were teachers), their hosts, cooperation from their hosts, newspaper publications, memorabilia, copies of memos, letters and any information that would advance the cause of the research. I received responses from five student participants, and one Professor, Dr. Sidney Simon (now deceased). During the research, I interviewed six additional student activists who did not return their questionnaires but were interested in talking to me about their activism at QC.[46] To my

greatest surprise, one of the respondents was a person whose information I needed the most because I had almost nothing relating to his Freedom Summer service in the QC archives. On the other hand, there were abundant archival materials including biographies, printed materials, clippings, correspondence, photographs, curriculum, lesson plans, preparatory and training materials, Freedom Summer documents, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) documents, memorandums, newspaper clippings, personal letters, memorabilia, souvenirs, Freedom Summer anniversaries, and reunions among other documents in the QC archives for about 30 participants. We have this trove of information in the QC Civil Rights archives not by accident but because Mark Levy (himself a Freedom Summer volunteer) who was one of the coordinators of the Civil Rights archives at Queens College, had created a QC Roll Call of activist alumni and faculty who served in the southern Civil Rights Movement and persuaded the QC activists of the 1960s to donate their personal CRM-related documents and materials to the QC archives, which most of them did so very graciously.[47] Some of these documents were arranged and indexed, others were not. To conduct this research, then, I waded through piles of boxes intermittently and sorted out what I needed over a period of four years. Yes, you heard it right, four years, for it is often said that archival research is not only a difficult art but it is perhaps the most demanding task of the historian.

An in-depth examination of the lives of the student activists, a thorough review of extensive material from the archives, and interviews conducted uncover a previously untold story of the 1960s student activism at QC. Reviewing archival records, documents, interviews (oral and print), and relevant secondary sources over the course of four years has allowed me to write this book. This study is based on sources derived from records of 31 QC subjects who through their written records, archival materials, and personal interviews have told their own stories. In conformity with modern academic historiography, the research for this book is based on primary sources from archival materials collected from the Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library at QC, whose Department of Special Collections and Archives contains an impressive collection. Also important, were the archival records I examined from the University of Southern Mississippi—McCain Library and Archives. Among those records reviewed are copies of the *Mississippi Free Press* edited by Lucy Komisar, a QC student who took a year off from her studies to write and edit for the paper from 1962 to 1963. This research has also benefitted

from the *Student Movements of the 1960s Project: The Reminiscences of Mario Savio*. The Savio interview was undertaken under the auspices of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University. *KZSU Project South Interviews* (SCOPE Chapter 33, Mickey Shur) from the Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California, proved helpful as well. The *KZSU* interviews were conducted by eight students from Stanford University during the summer of 1965 and were sponsored by *KZSU*, Stanford's student radio station. Other records reviewed include the *Tully-Crenshaw Feminist Oral History Project* Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, and Interview with Lucy Komisar conducted by Julie Altman. Some documents from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi were also reviewed. Other documents that have enriched the narrative in this book include the history of the Freedom Summer Project, private papers, diaries, correspondence, letters, memos, editorials, articles, letters to editors, mementos, letters to and from friends and family members of participants, memorabilia, flyers, curricular materials, and teaching aids that shed light on the contributions of QC students to the 1960s activism. Most of these materials were donated by the student activists themselves to the QC library. Some of the participants were interviewed to record their stories in their own voices. Where permitted, the attempt was made to tape the interviews for oral history and for posterity. The stories of the participants are told in their own voices and in the voices of the local people they encountered. I have identified and elaborated on the strategic moments that connect the archival materials at QC to events in the 1960s. The important questions this research is trying to answer are: Who are the QC student activists of 1960s? What catalyzed them to become activists? What did they achieve during their mission? What prompted them to think that they could make history themselves by confronting racism?

Obviously, a study of this nature required that I speak with some of the people involved. Fortunately, I was able to interview eleven subjects and one professor, Dr. Sidney B. Simon, for this book. Those interviewed were primarily people who had returned their questionnaires to me and agreed to do personal interviews with me or those who responded to some of the many questions I asked the activists on my list in the process of the research. I interviewed the eleven activists and one professor through e-mail correspondence, phone conversations, and/or face-to-face discussions. The phone and face-to-face interviews generally lasted

between one and two hours at a time and were repeated in many instances as needed. In one case, the interviews included numerous e-mail correspondence, numerous phone calls, and a lot of face-to-face conversations that have continued almost ad infinitum.[48] I must mention the fact that Dr. Simon gave me permission to tape his interviews, but the taping did not go well because of my inability to handle the taping equipment properly.

Since this is historical research based on archival sources and materials, I have adopted the chronological or sequential structure methodology. However, because of the nature of the data available to me, I have added thematic frameworks to the study to make for clarity and ease of understanding. The narratives are organized around specific themes that best define the events. These themes provide a fit within the historical sequence of events during the period under study and demarcate the historical construction of individual events. Conceptually and theoretically, I considered four thematic groundings for this book. Accordingly, I have created themes such as the *Pioneers*, who represent some of the first QC student volunteers who were engaged in activism at QC and went to the South for social justice advocacy from 1962 to 1963. They constituted the vanguard of social justice activism at QC in the 1960s. The *Trailblazers* were among the first group of QC volunteers who answered the call from SNCC and COFO for social justice activism in Mississippi in 1964. These were Freedom Summer activists who were part of the initiative designed to bring attention of the nation to the plight of African Americans in Mississippi. "These were deeply idealistic individuals, dedicated to achieving equal rights and human dignity for all."[49] They, in my view, were risk-takers who suffered intimidation and reprisals, spoke truth to power, and risked their lives to make a difference. They are those Howard Zinn said were not ashamed to be called "troublemakers," and "like the abolitionists of old; … they were proud of their ability to confront racism directly but nonviolently."[50] Bridge *Leaders* were social justice recruiters on and off QC campus. *Bridge Leaders* persuaded those who were already predisposed, to take the initial steps to participate in activism among QC students. Indeed, *Bridge Leaders* acted as middle managers who translated the organization's goals and objectives to the rank and file. Doug McAdam describes *Bridge Leaders* "as midwives to the recruitment process."[51] The *Rebuilders* were student activists and QC professors who went to Mississippi in 1965 to help rebuild Black churches that had been burned or bombed during Freedom Summer.[52]